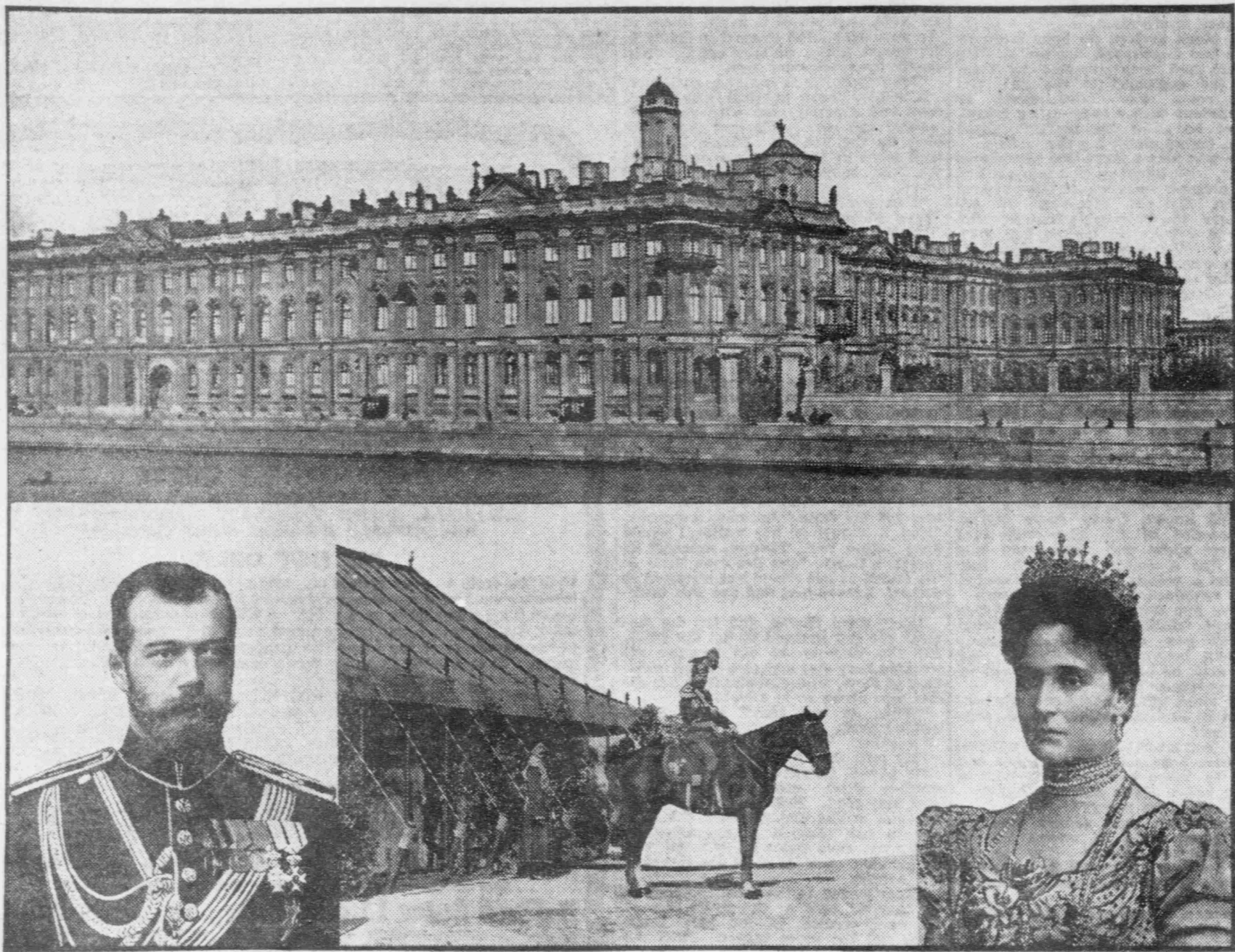


The Fear That Haunts the Czar of Russia

BY FREDERIC J. HASKIN.

Imperial Palace in St. Petersburg.



The Czar of Russia.

The Czar on Horseback.

The Russian Empress.

St. Petersburg—In these letters I have told about the poverty of the peasant, the squalor of the laboring man, the oppression of the Jew, and the empty life of the Muscovite woman, but the most unenviable figure in all Russia is the czar himself. What a dreadful thing it must be to go through life in arm with fear! How appalling to grow up with terror as a constant companion! Do you remember when you were a child how you were afraid in the dark? Do you remember how your heart would come into your throat at every sound when you were left alone? Well, that same dread haunts an autocrat all his life, except that instead of being the fanciful creatures of childish imagination, his goblins are real. When you stop to consider the menace that hangs over the life of Nicholas, czar of all the Russians, it is no wonder that he shudders when a window curtain rustles, or starts at the approach of an unexpected footstep. You would be frightened, too, if you knew that there were scores of men who cared nothing for their lives provided they could take yours.

Goblins That Are Real.

On a number of occasions Nicholas has missed death by the narrowest margin. While taking a trip through the east a fanatic whacked him across the head, almost killing him. That experience took away his desire for travel. He can't enjoy the sights on account of the expectation that some one is going to give out of the crowd and strike him. Shortly after his return home he was nearly poisoned. The drug was hidden in a peach intended for the monarch, but a princess happened to mistake the fruit first, and her death saved him. How would you relish your food if you were conscious of the probability that any bite might be your last?

Not long ago when the czar was in attendance at the sacred ceremony of blessing the water, some of his own soldiers fired upon him while he was in the act of kneeling down to pray, and the bullets of the murderers just grazed his mark. The terrorists taunt his majesty by every device their cunning can contrive. They want to keep fear alive in him. Once when turning the leaves of the family album he dropped the book with a start and hurried from the room. Some one had secretly placed therein a likeness of the scowling, sinister visage of a nihilist who had killed a former ruler. Sometimes the czar will awake to find a death's head pinned to the canopy of his bed, and again he will be startled by finding the evil design drawn in the most unexpected places.

Why Kill the Czar?

But the czar is a kindly man, you say; did he not call the peace conference? Why do men insist on seeking his life? It is because the basis of a despot's rule is the principle of keeping his subjects afraid of him. A long line of Russian czars has held sway over the people by tyrannizing them. The lash and the scaffold and the dungeon and exile to Siberia were the methods used by the tyrants to terrorize the people. The populace covered before its masters until it learned the trick of turning the tables. Now the ruler is afraid. Bombs, poison and the other weapons of the assassin are the means employed to instill fear into him and destroy his peace of mind. The mild Nicholas is heir to the hereditary hate of a race that will kill him if they can. That is why he lives in a castle that is armed like a fort; that is why he trembles when the curtains rustle.

The life of the Russian ruler is so secluded that facts upon which to base an estimate of his character must be gathered piece-meal. His religious inclination is shown by a strict observance of all forms of sacred ceremonial. At Easter it is the universal custom to exchange kisses with all whom one meets, and it is said that at this time his majesty does not hesitate to kiss the boy who makes the fires or the one who blacks his boots. That he is a stickler for form is further shown by his reported refusal of a letter of introduction in which the writer neglected to spell the word imperial with a capital letter.

Ghosts at the Palace.

Nicholas is credited with being a firm believer in the occult. He is said to delight in the seances of soothsayers and the divinations of astrologers. Many stories are in circulation about strange happenings at the palace where, in the solitude, the dead are evoked and spooks are called forth. It is said that the sorcerers manifested to him that he would have an heir, and that clairvoyants made him acquainted with the final incidents of the war with Japan long in advance of their occurrence. Another popular conception of the emperor's character is his exceeding fondness for his home and family. He is often reproached for devoting so much of his time to domestic matters rather than giving his attention to affairs of state.

Contrary to this impression, however, is the fact that his initials and remarks are found on the margin of so many public documents that it puzzles his assistants to know how one man can handle so many papers, let alone become acquainted with their contents. When a state bill is taken to the emperor he generally begins by examining the signatures. The eyes are in one column and the noses in another. If his majesty is not especially acquainted with the contents—and he cannot possibly be informed upon all the questions submitted to him—he generally signs with the minority, or on the side where he sees the names of officials in whose judgment he has confidence. If he has strong views of his own he places his signature in whichever column he sees fit, and this act outweighs the signatures of any number of opposing counsellors. Whichever side he supports wins, and this way a small minority may be transformed into a majority. The emperor often has peculiar ways of explaining himself. During the war the Japanese consul at one place demanded that a certain vessel be dispatched, and the paper containing the demand was sent in by the minister for the emperor's action, and he simply wrote on the margin: "The Japanese consul is a scoundrel," which the minister naturally interpreted as a refusal to meet the demand.

Signs His Name All Day.

Signing the papers of people appointed to office is part of the work done by the emperor. Even the commissions of school teachers have his personal signature affixed. He has to many documents to sign that sometime both he and the empress labor all day on this work alone. There is no time for investigating the different appointments. So much work could not be entrusted to one man. His responsibilities are about what President Roosevelt's would be if he had to do all the routine work of every governor and mayor in America, and we have only \$9,000,000 people against 140,000,000 in Russia. It stands to reason that, with so much to look after, many of his orders are not obeyed. He has no way of knowing whether his instructions are carried out or not. A case in question was that of the governor of Warsaw who recently issued his own religious edicts instead of those ordered by the czar.

This ponderous system has come to be known as "the dressing-down government." Most of the officials get up late in the morning, sign a few papers, then lounge around all day. Their principal activity is drawing their salaries. The official element is referred to as the people of the twentieth century government payroll. The bureaucratic class in Russia is so thoroughly organized for protecting its members in incapacity and wrongdoing that it has almost the strength of a hereditary caste. Instead of losing their positions for incompetence or neglect of duty, members are invariably transferred up and finally pensioned. They are never removed or punished except for offenses against the imperial family.

A Sentinel's Long Watch.

A sample of the inefficiency of this bungling system was afforded some years ago, when a distinguished visitor in one of the royal palaces noticed a sentry stationed in the center of a plot in the children's playground. He inquired why it was thought necessary to have a soldier on guard at this place. No one seemed to know. After considerable inquiry it was found that a no-

bly lady who once resided there had noticed an early flower budding on that particular spot, and requested that it should be protected for her. To insure its not being molested a sentry was ordered to mount guard, and in the absence of a countermarch, sentry duty was actually performed there day and night for years after the flower had withered and the lady had died.

Another instance of Russian procedure is worthy of mention. Once, when some new roads were to be built in a certain section, the official leeches in charge of the preliminary arrangements managed to prolong their deliberations until their salaries had consumed the entire appropriation. Their method was to raise a question about the volume of traffic going on over the various roads. A detachment of registrars was then

ordered to be placed at every crossway during six days of each month. These officials were to make a report of every peasant cart that passed, as well as an estimate of its cargo. After the census had been taken in one district the preliminary estimates. During all this time the traffic was hindered by official red tape, and in the end the roads remained as bad as ever.

Not Curious Like Teddy.

There are those who claim that one reason why the administration is so bad in Russia is because the czar lacks cu-

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rosity. He is not inquisitive, like Roosevelt. A man who happened to be in St. Petersburg from a district where disturbances had occurred was sent to the palace by some one who thought that his majesty would like to ask questions about the trouble. When admitted to the official presence, the czar said: "You are from so and so?" "Yes, your majesty," was the reply. The czar then remarked: "I have been there and I found the air in that locality to be very good," after which he exhibited no further interest in his caller or the condition of the people in the disturbed region. Under the same circumstances Roosevelt would have applied a running fire of questions to the visitor and pumped him dry of all facts in his possession before letting him depart.

All who know the emperor agree that he has a weak will and is easily led by those around him. In the course of his actions he constantly contradicts himself. Shortly after the death of his father he made this emphatic statement against rioting: "I am aware that in certain meetings in provincial assemblies voices have been lately raised by persons carried away by absurd illusions about participation in matters of national government. Let all know that, in devoting all my strength to the welfare of my people, I intend to protect the principle of autocracy as firmly and

unswervingly as my late and never-to-be-forgotten father." Later we find him declaring for reform, but hesitating to inaugurate it. When the manifesto authorizing the establishment of the duma was brought for his signature he was suspicious of it, but finally said: "If it is for the good of my people I will sign it." Before affixing his signature he took his little son in his arms, made the sign of the cross and delivered a short prayer. It is said that the empress was impatient with him for his hesitation. She insisted that the reform be put into effect, saying: "I want my son to have a happy reign."

Czar Is Not Crazy.

Because he is not strong-willed the reforms which he inaugurates are not instituted in time to accomplish the desired results. When approaching a crisis he holds back because he is fearful of doing the wrong thing. But despite his lack of decision the czar is undoubtedly a much-maligned man. While he may believe in spiritualism, he is not crazy, as many people claim. His callers invariably report him as being a sane, affable man who earnestly desires to do the right thing, but who lacks the strong executive qualities possessed by the German emperor, by Roosevelt, or even the king of England. It is said that if Russia had a stable government

like that of England the czar would make as acceptable a ruler as King Edward. The opinion of him held in America is largely a reflection of English sentiment, the Britishers being bitterly opposed to him on account of their resentment of Russian interference in eastern matters.

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